

Message Text

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71

ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 AID-20 CCO-00 FBO-01 NIC-01 OC-06 OPR-02

USSS-00 SCA-01 A-01 OMB-01 SY-10 SCS-03 DRC-01 /137 W

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R 211611Z DEC 73

FM AMEMBJTSY BEIRUT

TO CUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5771

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

USINT BAGHDAD

USINT CAIRO

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 14537

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT LE

SUBJ: WIDESPREAD UNREST IN LEBANON

SUMMARY: DEMONSTRATIONS WHICH BEGAN LAST WEEK HAVE TAKEN UGLIER TURN AS RESULT OF INCIDENT IN TRIPOLI, WITH RESULT THAT FOUR PERSONS DEAD AND EIGHT WOUNDED OVER PAST 3 DAYS IN THAT CITY. OTHER COASTAL CITIES ALSO EXPERIENCING STRIKES AND DEMONSTRATIONS. DRCING FORCE BEHIND DEMONSTRATIONS APPEARS TO BE ESSENTIALLY LEBANESE IN FORM OF NATURAL POPULAR DISCONTENT COMBINED WITH POLITICAL ELEMENTS OPPOSED TO PRESENT REGIME. IT APPEARS UNLIKELY THAT DEMONSTRATIONS WILL GET OUT OF HAND OR THAT THEY WILL FORCE MAJOR CHANGES IN GOVT, ALTHOUGH THEY LIKELY ACCELERATE STOP-GAP REFORM MJDSURDN IN SOME FIELDS. END SUMMARY.

1. NIGHT OF DEC 17-18, DEMONSTRATIONS IN NORTHERN COASTAL CITY OF TRIPOLI WERE FCDEDIUPON BY ONE OF ELDER STRONGMEN (I.E., "ABOUDAQA") OF FRANGIE CLAN AFTER SHOUTING SLOGANS CRITICAL OF PRES FRANGIE.

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TWO STUDENTS WOUNDED AND PASSIONS AROUSED WHICH LED TO EARLY-

MORNING ATTACK ON POLICE STATION, KILLING ONE POLICEMAN AND WOUNDING ONE. DURING DAY DEC 18 THERE WERE DEMONSTRATIONS THROUGHOUT TRIPOLI, WHICH WAS CLOSED BY GENERAL STRIKE. MARTIAL LAW DECLARED. WHEN TROOPS APPROACHED HOUSE OF WELL-KNOWN RADICAL LEBANESE TOUGH (FAROUK MOUQADDAM) LATE DEC 18 ONEY WERE FIRED UPON AND ONE SOLDIER KILLED AND ONE WOUNDED. THUS CAUSED ARMY TO RAID HOUSE, ARREST MOUQADDAM PLUS 20 OF HIS GANG AND CONFISCATE MANY GUNS, EXPLOSIVES AND ANTI-GOL TRACTS. DURING DEMONSTRATIONS DEC 19 AND 20, TWO DEMONSTRATORS KILLED AND SEVERAL WOUNDED.

2. DURING DAY DEC 19 AND THROUGHOUT DEC 20 THERE WERE SMALL SCALE DEMONSTRATIONS, MOSTLY BY STUDENTS, IN BEIRUT AND SEVERAL BOMBS AND-LOR DYNAMITE STICKS SET OFF IN VARIOUS PLACES, INCLUDING BUSINESS DISTRICT. GENERAL STRIKE CALL FOR DEC 21 HAS BEEN PARTIALLY EFFECTIVE, DESPITE REFUSAL OF TADE UNIONS TO PARTICIPATE. FULL COMPLIANCE IN STAUNCHLY PAN-ARAB SECTIONS OF CITY AND PERIODIC (DURING DEMONSTRATIONS) COMPLIANCE ELSEWHERE. UNIVERSITIES AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS ON STRIKE WITH STUDENTS DEMONSTRATING, OPPOSED BY POLICE AND ARMY. SOME PERSONS LIGHLY INJURED BY BOMB BUT NO MAJOR VIOLENCE.

3. ON DEC 20 THERE WAS GENERAL STRIKE AND MASS DEMONSTRATION IN SOUTHERN COASTAL CITY OF SIDON, INCLUDING BURNING OF UN VEHICLE TRYING PASS THROUGH TOWN. DEMONSTRATIONS AND STRIKE CONTINUING THERE ON DEC 21.

4. ORIGINAL THEME OF DEMONSTRATIONS WAS HIGH COST OF LIVING (A REAL PROBLEM HERE TO SOARING INFLATION OVER RECENT WEEKS), BUT IN FACT DEMONSTRATIONS WERE EXTENSION OF THOSE ORGANIZED PRECEDING WEEK PRIOR TO KISSINGER VISIT WHICH HAD AS THEMES EDUCATIONAL REFORM AND LIBERATION OF PUBLISHZM GHASSAN TUENI, AS WELL AS HIGH COST OF LIVING AND VISIT OF SECRETARY OF STATE. THEN, AS NOW, THERE WERE CERTAIN RADICAL ELEMENTS EXACERBATING POPULAR DISCONTENT AND TRYING CHANNEL IT FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES. ONCE VIOLENCE BROKE OUT AND MOUQADDAM ARRESTED, MANY POLITICAL OPPONENTS AND RIVALS OF PRESENT REGIME (E.G., JUMBLATT, KARAME; SAEB SALAM, VARIOUS SUNNI MOSLEM GROUPS) JOINED FRAY, TRYING TRANSFORM IT INTO CHRISTIAN-MOSLEM DISPUTE IN ORDER INCREASE EMOTION. CHRISTIAN POLITICAL LEADERS SNIPING FROM SIDELINES BUT REFUSED BE DRAGGED IN. CONFIDENTIAL

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SAME TRUE OF MAJOR TRADE UNIONS WHICH HAVE ALREADY CALLED FOR NATIONWIDE GENERAL STRIKE FEB 6 IF GOL FAILS ARREST INFLATION.

5. AS OF MID-AFTERNOON DEC 21, DEMONSTRATIONS AND LOW-LEVEL VIOLENCE REPORTED IN ALL MAJOR COASTAL CITIES. HOWEVER, GOL AND SOME OPPOSITION LEADERS APPEAR KEEN ON FINDING MEANS CALMING PASSIOFY, AND SECURITY FORCES ARE ABLE MAINTAIN FAIR DEGREE OF CONTROL IN MOST PLACES. ADVENT OF CHRISTIAN AND MOSLEM HOLIDAY

SEASONS LIKELY AID GOL IN RESTORING CALM, AS WILL CERTAIN STOP-
GAP MEASURES WHICH GOL CLAIMS IT WILL TAKE TO BEGIN DEAL WITH HIGH
COST OF LIVING. NEVERTHELESS, ANOTHER INCIDENT LIKE SHOOTING OF
TWO STUDENTS ON DEC 17 COULD TOUCH OFF MAJOR EXPLOSION, GIVEN
NATURAL LEBANESE PENCHANT FOR VIOLENCE AND GUNS (WHICH PROLIFERATE
AMONGST POPULATE). MOREOVER, COMBINATION OF POPULAR SOCIO-ECONO-
MIS DISCONTENT AND EFFORTS BY RIVAL POLITICAL LEADERS EXPLOIT THIS
DISCONTENT CAN BE EXPECTED CONTINUE CREATE TROUBLE AS THIS
HIGHLY-POLITICIZED COUNTRY BEGINS TO LOOK TOWARD NEXT NATIONAL
ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS (IN 1974 OR FIRST PART OF 1975) AND PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTIONS IN 1976.

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